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*Seminar Series on Ideas, Identities and Decisional Processes that Affect Security*

## **Risa Brooks**

**"'Stupid' Terrorists? Why Homegrown Terrorists are Often Incapable of Deadly Attacks in the United States"**

Monday, May 23, 2011

3:30 p.m.

Mershon Center for International Security Studies

1501 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43201

To hear the streaming audio from this event, [click here](#)



Risa Brooks  
Assistant Professor  
Political Science  
Marquette University

Risa Brooks is an assistant professor of political science at Marquette University. Her research focuses on issues related to civil-military relations, military effectiveness, and militant and terrorist organizations; she also has a regional interest in the Middle East.

Her current research explores themes related to "societal-militant group" relations. Specifically, she is interested in a variety of research questions that explore relationships between militant/terrorist groups and the societies in which they originate, embed, or with which they identify. Her recent work in this area includes studies of the phenomenon of "homegrown" or domestic terrorism in the United States, as well studies of how whether transnational terrorist entities can establish foreign sanctuaries affects their abilities to attack distant (Western) targets.

Brooks is the author of *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton University Press, 2008) and editor (with Elizabeth Stanley) of *Creating Military Power: The Sources of Military Effectiveness* (Stanford University Press, 2007), as well as many articles in the field of international security.

She received her PhD from the University of California, San Diego (2000), and her professional experiences include positions as research

associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (London, U.K.), postdoctoral fellow at Stanford's Center for International Security and Arms Control (CISAC), and a predoctoral affiliation with the Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University.

### **Lecture Abstract**

Analysts and observers regularly observe that terrorists in the United States seem especially incapable of preparing and executing their attacks, such that they are often apprehended and make crucial mistakes. Why is this? Are homegrown terrorists in the United States especially subpar compared with other classes of terrorists? This presentation explores the interaction of three factors that explain the relative incapacity of terrorists in the United States: a security environment that generates a diverse array of mechanisms for detecting terrorist activity, a lack of experience in terrorist tradecraft among aspiring militants, and the way that the security environment precludes individuals from attaining the skills necessary to avoid detection in the first place and successfully execute their attacks. Drawing from recent cases, especially instances of apparent Muslim-American "homegrown" terrorism, about which there has been growing public concern, this presentation underscores the limited capacity of self-initiated terrorists to execute deadly attacks in the United States.

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